

The VA is Expanding Hepatitis C Treatment

What is Hepatitis C (HCV)?

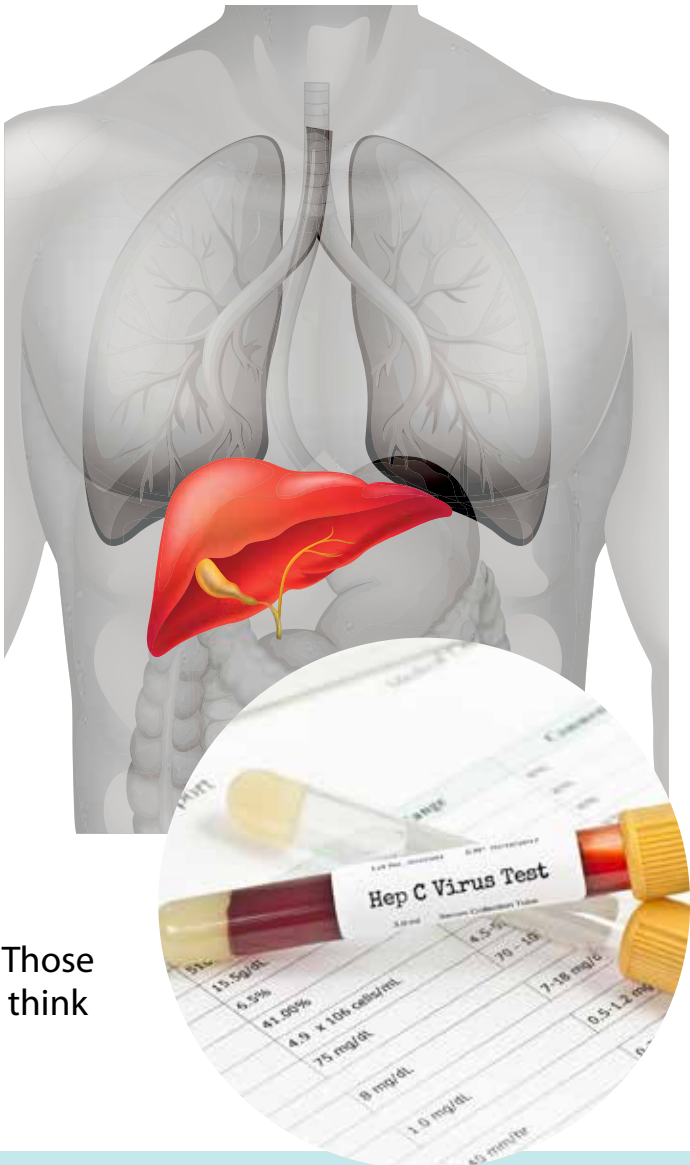
HCV is a virus that affects the liver. It is responsible for causing liver failure (cirrhosis), liver cancer and is the primary cause of liver transplants in the US.

There are more than 170,000 Veterans with known chronic HCV who are getting care in the VA system. But it is estimated that over 800,000 Veterans still need to be screened for HCV.

You can have hepatitis C for 10 to 30 years before there are any clear symptoms, which is why most people with chronic hepatitis C are unaware they are infected. There is no vaccine for hepatitis C, but effective treatments are now available. A blood test is the only way to diagnose a hepatitis C infection.

Should I be tested for Hepatitis C (HCV)?

Veterans have unusually high rates of hepatitis C, especially Veterans born between 1945 and 1965. Those Veterans should be tested once, even if they don't think they have been exposed to HCV.



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HCV testing is strongly recommended for those who:

- ▮ were born between 1945 and 1965.
- ▮ have ever injected drugs, even those who injected only once or just a few times many years ago.
- ▮ received clotting factor concentrates produced before 1987.
- ▮ were ever on long-term hemodialysis.
- ▮ have persistently abnormal alanine aminotransferase levels (ALT).
- ▮ have HIV infection or a weakened immune system.
- ▮ received a tattoo or body piercing in a non-regulated setting.
- ▮ received a transfusion of blood, blood components, or an organ transplant before July 1992.
- ▮ are healthcare, emergency medical, or public safety workers.
- ▮ were born to an HCV-positive woman.

If I do have Hepatitis C, is there any treatment?

There are several new treatments which have become available in the last year and more treatments are expected later this year. These treatments last on average 12 weeks, are easy to take, and can cure more than 90% of HCV infections. The VA has treated over 76,000 Veterans infected with hepatitis C and approximately 60,000 have been cured.

The VA is committed to identifying and curing any Veteran who may benefit from treatment. Please ask your doctor, nurse practitioner or pharmacist if you should be tested for hepatitis C.

For more information about hepatitis C treatment visit: <http://www.hepatitis.va.gov>

Submitted by:
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Be Safe

Do you use statements such as “take care” or “be careful” when talking to those you care about? These statements are common ways we end conversations, but they are also a way to tell others we don’t want any harm to come to them.

The VA wants to help you to remain free of harm in order to live a healthy and productive life. In fact, one of the VA’s Nine Healthy Living Messages for Veterans is “Be Safe.”

This message was recently expanded to five important categories:

Prevent Falls

Among older adults, falls are the leading cause of injury related deaths.

Prevent Intimate Partner Violence

Both men and women can experience emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse at the hands of a partner.

Prevent Motor Vehicle Crashes

Motor vehicles are the leading cause of death in Veterans in the early years after returning from deployment.

Prevent Self-Harm

Recognize signs that you or someone you know may be in crisis.

Prevent Sexually Transmitted Infections

You get these infections by having sex with an infected partner.

The VA has a handout for each one of these topics. They will provide you with helpful tips based on the latest evidence. Ask someone on your PACT team how to obtain more Be Safe information or check out this website:

http://www.prevention.va.gov/Healthy_Living/Be_Safe.asp





Women's View

VHA Office of Women's Health Services introduces New Mobile Apps for Women Veterans

Available NOW:

Caring4WomenVeterans

- 🚫 Learn about health issues common to specific era of service, including Gulf, Iraq, and Afghanistan wars.
- 🚫 View screening and treatment guidelines for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Military Sexual Trauma (MST).
- 🚫 Share helpful, relevant resources with women Veterans who are transitioning to civilian life.



Preconception Care

- 🚫 Find questions to help guide discussions about planning for or preventing pregnancy.
- 🚫 Access talking points about health issues and concerns specific to pre-pregnancy and pregnancy decisions.
- 🚫 Review a healthy lifestyle checklist with Veterans.



Coming SOON!

VA Moms – For Pregnant Veterans:

- 🚫 Access to pregnancy and childbirth resources.
- 🚫 Use tools to track pregnancy care and well-being.

Additional Apps Available Include:

Parenting2Go

Addresses challenges that come with parenting and provides convenient tools to help you:

- 🦋 Strengthen your parenting skills
- 🦋 Reconnect with your children
- 🦋 Handle every day parenting situations, including those unique to military life

Mindfulness Coach

Mindfulness Coach was designed to help Veterans, Service members and others learn how to practice mindfulness.

MovingForward

With the Moving Forward App you can access on-the-go tools and learn problem solving skills to overcome obstacles and deal with stress.

It is helpful in managing challenges such as:

- 🦋 financial difficulties
- 🦋 relationship problems, difficult career decisions
- 🦋 coping with physical injuries
- 🦋 returning to civilian life
- 🦋 balancing school and family life

VA Mobile Health supports VA's commitment to transform the way care is delivered. Apps can improve communications and health care coordination between Veterans and their care teams, allowing Veterans to be more active in their health care. VA mobile health is as an essential element of health care.

Is it safe to use VA mobile health apps?

Yes, all VA personal health data will be encrypted during transmission. Apps that connect to the Electronic Health Record (EHR) require strong user authentication and will not store any personal health information on the mobile device.

To access available apps, visit the VA App Store at <https://mobile.va.gov/appstore>

For more information about WHA's Office of Women's Health Services and to view additional resources for women Veterans visit: <http://www.womenshealth.va.gov/>

Submitted by:
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Are Opioids Safe to Use?

Living with chronic pain can be difficult. Your VA providers are here to help you understand your treatment options and some of the medications that may be prescribed to help relieve your pain.

Opioids are a type of drug that can be found in many medicines. Opioids are very strong pain killers which have serious health risks if you take them on a routine basis. Opioids can also be found in illegal drugs such as heroin.

Opioids come in forms such as pills, liquids, shots, rectal suppositories or a patch for the skin.

Examples include:

- ▶ Hydrocodone (Vicodin®)
- ▶ Oxycodone (OxyContin®)
- ▶ Oxymorphone (Opana®)
- ▶ Methadone
- ▶ Fentanyl

Safety Tips

Your medical history and other medications will affect the way your body responds to opioids.

Do

- ▶ Ask how and what time to take the medicine.
- ▶ Tell your Provider if you smoke or drink alcohol.
- ▶ Tell your Provider about any history of drug abuse or addiction.
- ▶ Report any over-the-counter medicines you take.
- ▶ Use only as prescribed. If you are taking your medicine more often or if you crave opioids frequently, tell your Provider.
- ▶ Keep your medicine in a safe place such as a locked box, away from children and strangers.
- ▶ Dispose of expired or unused opioids at hazardous waste disposal sites.

Do Not

- ▶ Suddenly stop taking opioids without telling your Provider. You may have withdrawal symptoms, such as diarrhea, chills, shakes and nausea.
- ▶ Change your dose without first talking to your Provider.
- ▶ Share or sell opioids to others! It is illegal.
- ▶ Mix opioids with alcohol.
- ▶ Take these drugs while also taking opioids (unless your Provider tells you it's ok).
 1. Benzodiazepines (such as Xanax® and Valium®)
 2. Muscle relaxants (such as Soma® or Flexeril®)
 3. Hypnotics (such as Ambien® or Lunesta®)
 4. Other prescription opioid pain relievers

Seek medical treatment right away if you are:

- ▶ Feeling dizzy or drunk.
- ▶ Having trouble waking up or falling asleep.
- ▶ Having trouble breathing (call 911).
- ▶ Snoring heavily during sleep.

Remember there may be other ways to manage your pain, such as:

- ▶ Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil®)
- ▶ Physical therapy and exercise

It is important to discuss all possible treatment options with your health care providers. Taking responsibility for your opioid medicine will keep you safe from overdose, misuse and abuse.

Sources:

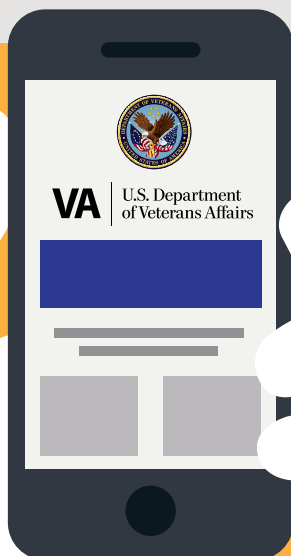
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HELP A FELLOW VET

Always **CALL** to
cancel or reschedule
if you can't keep your
appointment!



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Your best source for information about your health will always be your health care team. We hope this newsletter will encourage you to ask questions about your health concerns.

Phone Numbers for VISN 12 Hospitals

Hines:	708-202-8387
Iron Mountain:	906-774-3300
Jesse Brown:	312-569-8387
Lovell:	800-393-0865
Madison:	608-256-1901
Milwaukee:	888-469-6614
Tomah:	800-872-8662
VA Illiana	217-554-3000

“Ask An Expert” Question or Idea for Future Articles

Do you have an “Ask An Expert” question or a suggestion for future topics for articles? Your ideas can be e-mailed or mailed to the Senior Editor.

E-mail: **SrEditorGreatLakesVAHealthviews@va.gov**

Mailing address:

Jill Zahn

Milwaukee VA Medical Center Library

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VISN 12 VA Healthcare facilities are accredited by The Joint Commission. Joint Commission evaluates healthcare facilities on quality, safety of patient care and safety of the environment.

If you have any concerns about patient care or safety in your facility, first contact the person in charge. If your concern cannot be resolved, the VA encourages you to contact Joint Commission. You may request a “public information interview.” Requests can be made to:

Division of Accreditation Operations, Office of Quality Monitoring
The Joint Commission
One Renaissance Boulevard, Oakbrook Terrace, IL 60181
1-800-994-6610

Copies of Great Lakes VA Healthviews are available in the waiting rooms of the VISN 12 Medical Centers and community outpatient clinics.

You can view online or subscribe to the electronic version of this newsletter by going to the VISN 12 home page www.visn12.va.gov

